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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 002166

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION UPDATE

REF: TAIPEI 02066

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: On election eve, the National Assembly (NA) election remains largely overshadowed by media focus on cross-Straits relations, Soong's PRC visit, and President Chen's relations with other political leaders. Nevertheless the major parties have launched a last minute effort to mobilize support for their NA tickets. The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is emphasizing its long-standing commitment to constitutional reform. The KMT has rolled out its familiar theme of the "ROC" and cross-Straits stability. Finding itself positioned on the same side of the aisle with the DPP in support of proposed constitutional reforms, the KMT has had to counter allegations from deep Blue critics that the constitutional reforms it supports will lead to de jure Taiwan independence. The People First Party (PFP) has attempted to portray itself as the party of moderation and reconciliation, but even James Soong's May 12 meeting with PRC leader Hu Jintao has failed to ignite much enthusiasm among PFP voters. The pro-independence Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) continues to leverage Pan-Green discontent over President Chen's relatively conciliatory stance on recent Pan-Blue visits to the Mainland to obscure the fact that it is running against the popular constitutional reforms. End Summary.

Turnout Rate Decides Election

12. (U) A TVBS poll released May 11 showed the KMT garnering 29 percent of the votes cast island-wide, DPP 22 percent, TSU four percent, and PFP three percent. The poll also predicted a voter turnout rate of 42 percent, with a substantial 61 percent of the public still reporting they do not understand the issues in the NA election. Other political observers predicted an even lower turnout, noting that the lack of enthusiasm among centrist voters is likely to benefit those parties that succeed in mobilizing core supporters on election day. Legislative Yuan (LY) President Wang Jin-pyng, a KMT Vice Chairman, told AIT that DPP might perform slightly better than the KMT because 60 percent of DPP supporters will turn out to vote while only 40 percent of KMT supporters will go to the polls on election day.

DPP: True Reformers

13. (C) Despite coming under pressure following his earlier attacks on his political opponents, Chen Shui-bian has continued to dominate the air waves this week, during which he has touted the proposed constitutional reforms as crucial to Taiwan's political development. Chen used most of a two-hour televised interview on May 12 to explain the significance of the NA election and the constitutional revision package. While Chen rejected James Soong's "two sides, one China" formulation in his May 12 televised remarks -- a hardline response in part aimed at shoring up last-minute support for the DPP in the May 14 election -- his overall tone last night was more conciliatory than those he made in two television interviews earlier this week. Chen, for example, largely chose not to criticize the KMT, which shares the DPP's position on the constitutional reform package.

14. (C) The Executive Yuan's (EY) Research, Development and Evaluation Commission (RDEC) Minister Yeh Jiunn-rong, a DPP nominee for the NA, told AIT that DPP and KMT cooperation in the NA constitutional reforms will provide another opportunity for cross-party cooperation, in addition to President Chen's invitation for cross-party cooperation on cross-Straits issues. The two parties, he explained, will need to coordinate and work together, first, to try and pass the NA Procedural Implementing Law in the ten days before the NA meets around June 1 and, failing that, in the NA itself to pass procedural rules on which the NA will operate. In any event, he told AIT, he expects the NA meetings to proceed smoothly. Many of the members, he pointed out, will be scholars like himself, rather than contentious politicians.

KMT: Popularity Contest

15. (C) The KMT is once again playing it safe and using familiar themes in the NA campaign. As it did in the December 2004 Legislative Yuan (LY) election campaign, the KMT is defining the NA election as a struggle to safeguard the "Republic of China" and to promote cross-Strait stability. The party has been emphasizing its commitment to peaceful and stable political reform, while campaigning to refute allegations that the LY-approved constitutional reform package would lead to de jure Taiwan independence. KMT Overseas Affairs Director Ho Szu-yin told AIT that the actual issues that the NA will debate are "far too complicated" for the electorate, so the KMT has not even attempted to explain them. Rather, Ho explained, the KMT has presented the NA election as a "thermometer" for partisan popularity. Citing a DPP internal poll that showed approval rating for the KMT increasing by ten percent after KMT Chairman Lien Chan's return from the PRC, Ho said the KMT is hoping to be able to turn the success of Lien's PRC visit into electoral support.

16. (C) The KMT may be trying some scare tactics as well. RDEC Minister and DPP candidate Yeh told AIT that he was caught off guard by the sudden reemergence of the "name rectification" (zhengming) issue on May 9. That day's pro-Blue United Daily News reported that a "high level source in the Executive Yuan" disclosed that Premier Frank Hsieh intended to revive name rectification and "will soon restart the plan for changing the name of state-run companies and overseas representative offices and will promote this plan in stages." Yeh explained that the report brought back unpleasant memories of President Chen's unsuccessful effort to use name rectification as an issue in the December LY campaign. When Yeh queried EY Secretary General Lee Ying-yuan, Lee told Yeh -- and later publicly stated -- that the report was false. Lee explained to Yeh that he himself is in charge of the committee that handles name rectification, and that committee had not met since Premier Hsieh put name rectification on hold after taking office in January 2005. The newspaper report, Yeh charged angrily, was "KMT disinformation" to scare voters away from the DPP and into the arms of the KMT.

PFP: In Soong's Shadow

17. (C) The PFP is hoping to win the support of centrist voters by promoting the theme of party-to-party reconciliation. PFP has been running a television commercial portraying an antique Portuguese map of an earth-colored Taiwan melding into the color blue in the North and green in the South. When the two colors clash, the island splits in two, and a voice-over asks how did Taiwan become one country on each side (yi bian yi guo). An orange (the PFP's color) thread then weaves the two sides together and restores unity and equanimity to the island.

18. (C) PFP Legislator Sun Ta-chien, however, told AIT that he does not believe the party's campaign theme has been successful in arousing votes for the PFP. Soong's continued flirtation with Chen Shui-bian, he complained, has caused many PFP core supporters to abandon the party. Soong's public insistence that he is not Chen's envoy and opposition to Taiwan independence, notwithstanding, Sun lamented that "Soong is too close to Abian." On Chen's public charge that Soong held a secret meeting in the U.S. with PRC Taiwan Affairs Office Director Chen Yunlin, Sun noted that Soong had denied the charge but wondered why Soong had not lashed out at Chen for making the accusation. Sun told AIT that, despite the PFP's best efforts, he predicted the KMT and DPP will win the election and the PFP will end up with only three percent of the vote. The real problem, he said, is that James Soong does not care about this election, and that the media coverage garnered for Soong's PRC visit will help only Soong himself.

TSU: Capturing the DPP Protest Vote

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19. (C) The pro-independence TSU has targeted its NA campaign at "deep" Green supporters who are increasingly dissatisfied with President Chen's tack to the political center following the December 2004 LY election. The TSU has also seized on deep Green anger over the Pan-Blue outreach to the PRC, characterizing the NA election as a struggle between forces that support Taiwanization and those obsessed with "China fever." TSU Secretary General Chen Chien-ming told AIT that his party sees the NA election as crucial to its long-term survival. If the party can outperform its disappointing showing in December 2004, Chen said, then it will have a much greater say on issues like nominations for the December local election. TSU officials and PFP officials are also hoping to gain a combined 25 percent of the vote in order to have a chance to shape NA procedural rules in a way that may derail

the reform package.

Comment: Highjacked Election

110. (C) The NA election has clearly lost its original focus. The purpose of the election has transformed from being an opportunity to elect party representatives to debate and ratify a set of constitutional amendments passed by the LY last August to being a public verdict on the performance on the leaders of each political party. From the beginning, the NA election attracted little public interest because the Taiwan electorate traditionally and historically "votes for the candidate, not a party." In order to attract interest in the election, the political parties hitched their NA election campaigns to the media attention on Lien and Soong's PRC visits and Chen's reactions to those visits.
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